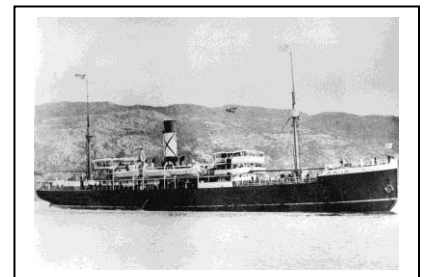




Private William James Benson (Regimental Number 4132) is buried in Terlincthun British Cemetery, Wimille – Grave reference VI. E. 10.

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of a lumberman and railroader working for the *Reid Newfoundland Company*, William James Benson was a recruit of the Seventeenth Draft. Having presented himself for medical examination at Headquarters at the Church Lads Brigade Armoury in St. John's on November 19 of 1917, he then enlisted - engaged *for the duration of the war* at the private soldier's daily rate of \$1.10 – and attested on that same day.



Private Benson did not embark for overseas service until some four weeks later again, the date December 11, when he boarded the Bowring Brothers' Red Cross Line vessel *Florizel* (right above) en route for Halifax.

(continued)

But it was not from Halifax that Private Benson sailed on His Majesty's Transport *Missanabie* (right) to the United Kingdom. The draft embarked in the port of St. John, New Brunswick, on or about December 18 before departure on the morrow. *Missanabie* then docked in Glasgow on December 31, New Year's Eve.



Having disembarked in Scotland, the Newfoundland contingent entrained for the short journey to the Regimental Depot. By this time, the Depot at Ayr had already been in existence serving as the base for the 2nd (Reserve) Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment for well over two years, with a temporary move to the town of Barry in the summer of 1917. Private Benson was to be in Ayr for just some two weeks before being transferred southward to another camp.



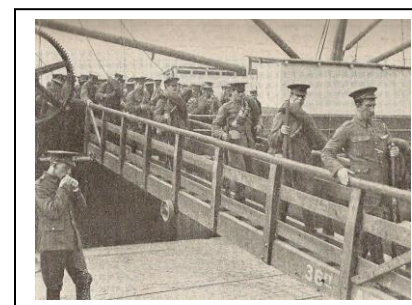
(Right above: *an aerial view of Ayr – probably from the period between the Wars: Newton-on Ayr is to the left of the River Ayr and the Royal Borough is to the right. – courtesy of the Carnegie Library at Ayr*)

In the New Year of 1918, 2nd (Reserve) Battalion moved quarters from the Royal Borough of Ayr in Scotland to southern England, to Hazely Down, Hampshire, not far distant from the cathedral city of Winchester. This transfer was finalized during the latter part of January, 1918, and it was to be from Hazely Down that Private Benson was to be despatched, in May, to join the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent.



(Right above: *a bleak-looking Hazely Down Camp at some time during the winter of 1918 – from The War Illustrated*)

On May 25 the 46th Re-enforcement Draft of one-hundred twenty *other ranks*, from Hazely Down – Private Benson one of that number - passed through the English Channel port of Folkestone and, on the 27th, two days later likely via Le Havre, arrived in the French city of Rouen where it made its way to the British Expeditionary Force Base Depot located there, for final training and organization* before finding the way to 1st Battalion.



(Right above: *British troops disembark at Rouen en route to the Western Front. – from Illustration*)

(continued)

**Apparently, the standard length of time for this final training at the outset of the war had been ten days – although this was to become more and more flexible as the War progressed - in areas near Rouen, Étapes, LeHavre and Harfleur that became known notoriously to the troops as the Bull Rings.*

Private Benson is recorded as having reported *to duty* to 1st Battalion on May 31 at Écuire where the Newfoundlanders were stationed at the time. In fact, the date of his arrival was likely the day before – May 30 - as documented in the *Regimental War Diary* when an incoming contingent of one-hundred seventeen *other ranks* from Rouen is noted. The Diary also notes – on both days – *fine weather and enemy air-raids*.

Meanwhile, just days after the crisis of the German spring offensive had passed, on April 24 – and some five weeks before Private Benson's arrival at Écuire - the Newfoundlanders of 1st Battalion officially had said farewell to their comrades-in-arms of 88th Brigade and 29th Division and on the morrow had participated in a recessional parade attended by the officer commanding 88th Brigade, Brigadier Freyberg.

They would later be deployed to another unit, but for the summer of 1918 1st Battalion was to move a world away from Flanders where it had just fought, to be stationed on the west coast of France.

On April 29, the Newfoundlanders – 1st Battalion by now reduced to a total strength of just thirty officers and four-hundred sixty-four other ranks - took train in Belgium for the French coastal town of Étapes, where they arrived at eleven o'clock in the late evening. For now, for them, the fighting was a thing of the past.

The summer of 1918 was to pass peaceably enough for most of the personnel of 1st Battalion. For the months of May, June and until early July, the unit was posted to Écuire, to the Headquarters of Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in Europe.



(Right: Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force at the time of the Battalion's posting to GHQ – from Illustration)

This was, of course, both the time and place of Private Benson's reporting *to duty in the field* with 1st Battalion.

The cosmetic honour of this new role, however, masked the reality that the 1st Battalion of the recently-proclaimed *Royal Newfoundland Regiment* was no longer capable of serving in the field.

**Although few at home cared to admit it publicly, the problem was that 1st Battalion had run out of reserves and was unable to continue as a fighting entity. It was to be September before even a battalion of reduced strength could return to active service. At home, mandatory military service was initiated – conscription by another name – but with limited results.*

(continued)

The posting to Écuire completed, for most of July and all of August the Newfoundlanders were encamped in much the same area, close to the coastal village of Équièhen – itself not far removed from the large Channel port of Boulogne – and far to the rear of the fighting, of which there had been plenty elsewhere.



(Right above: a view of the sparsely-populated coastal community of Équièhen at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card)

Re-enforced, the Newfoundlanders returned to the fray on Friday, September 13, as one of the three battalions of the 28th Brigade of 9th Scottish Division. 1st Battalion was once more to serve on the Belgian front where, some six weeks later, having advanced out of the *Ypres Salient*, it would finish its war on October 26 at a place called Inghoyghem (*Ingooigem*).

On September 28, the Belgian Army and the 2nd British Army broke out of their positions, overrunning the enemy lines. It was the start, for them, of the *Hundred Days Offensive**. On the following day, the Newfoundlanders were fighting at the Keiberg Ridge.



After almost four years of stalemate, it was once again to be a conflict of movement.

(Right above: *British troops and German prisoners in Flanders during the Hundred Days – from Illustration*)

**This offensive would prove to be the final campaign of the Western Front and would terminate with the Armistice of November 11. It had begun further to the south on July 18 on the French front on the River Marne, followed on August 8 by an onslaught by British and Empire troops near Amiens in what would also become known as 3rd Somme.*

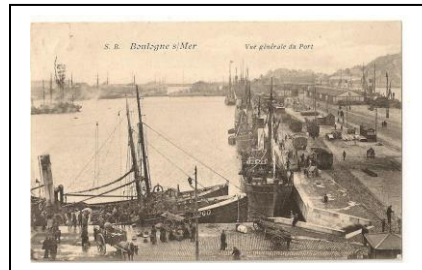
The advance, despite fierce resistance at times, was relentless. On October 14, 1st Battalion, having been rested for a week after heavy fighting near Ledeghem, returned to the front for a new drive to commence on that day. The Newfoundlanders were to push along the northern bank of the River-Canal Lys, itself north of the city of Courtrai (today *Kortrijk*) which they were to bypass. The advance of the 14th was successful - but the cost again high: only three hundred reporting for muster at dawn on the following morning.



(Right above: *the Lys – both canal and river – at a point not far from the crossing-place – right to left - of October 19-20, 1918 - The Harlebeke Caribou stands about at a distance of about one hundred metres behind the camera. – photograph from 2010*)

(continued)

Private Benson was one of the many casualties of that October 14. Where he was treated during the interim seems not to be recorded, but by October 17 he had been admitted into the 55th General Hospital in Boulogne to be treated for injuries to the left thigh and knee - and to halt the spread of gangrene, his leg was of necessity amputated. On the 22nd Private Benson was deemed to be *seriously ill* and on the 25th, *dangerously ill*.



(Right above: *the French port of Boulogne at or about the time of the Great War - from a vintage post-card*)

The son of Samuel Benson (former section foreman with the railway, deceased March 13, 1917) and Emma Jane Benson (deceased September 14, 1906) of Bay Bulls Arm (today *Sunnyside*) and later of Rantem (south-east of Swift Current), he was brother to Irene – to whom he had allotted a daily sixty cents from his pay – as well as step-brother* to Chesley, Flossie, Fred and Violetta-Bel – died 1917, aged five.



Private Benson – a soldier serving with ‘C’ Company - was reported as having *died of wounds - and systemic infection -* in the same 55th General Hospital on October 29, 1918.

William James Benson had enlisted at the age of eighteen years and seven months.

**Samuel was married a second time, to Jane (née Goobie) in or about 1908. After Samuel’s death, she and her family returned to Bay Bulls Arm.*

(Right above: *The Caribou at Harlebeke commemorates the crossing of the Lys Canal and the sacrifices of the last campaign of the War. – photograph from 2012*)

Private William James Benson was entitled to the British War Medal (on left) and also to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



(continued)

Mr C R Bennett
Minister of Militia

Bay Bulls Arm
March 28, 1919

Dear Sir As my money have not come this month I taught I would write to see hav you sent it out an its gone astray I have Been waiting mail after male an it haven't come yet its all we are depending on with 4 in family we hav know other support at all only that

will you please see to it an send it me

I am yours truly
Mrs Jane Benson

**Note on Letter: Allotment discontinued payable to sister
Separation allowance cancelled Jan 31st payable to mother**

(Right and far right: *The sacrifice of Private Benson is honoured on both the Sunnyside War Memorial and a family monument in the United Church Cemetery in the community. - photographs from 2014)*

